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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT MOTLANTHE'S STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

Summary

[¶1.](#) (U) President Kgalema Motlanthe, the unelected "caretaker" president of South Africa, delivered his first and only State of the Nation Address at the opening of parliament on 6 February 2009. Motlanthe found himself in a unique situation as, not only is he essentially holding office for ANC President Jacob Zuma after the dismissal of former president Thabo Mbeki, he delivered the address three months ahead of a general election. Despite credible rumors that Zuma supporters within the ANC preferred that Motlanthe's speech be downgraded to a parliamentary statement rather than a presidential address, he successfully avoided overshadowing the "president in waiting" Jacob Zuma. End Summary.

Motlanthe Addresses the Nation

[¶2.](#) (U) President Kgalema Motlanthe, reading directly from his notes from a speech crafted by the left-over speechwriters of former president Thabo Mbeki, periodically glancing at his audience, delivered the president's State of the Nation Address at Parliament on February 6, 2009. Elevated to the presidency following the ANC decision in September 2008 to recall Thabo Mbeki, Motlanthe has the distinction of receiving neither an electoral mandate nor the unequivocal support of the ruling party. He acknowledged the unique circumstances that led to his unusual presidency and praised the seamless transition and continuity of government, largely due to the maturity of South Africa's constitutional system; but primarily to Mbeki's cooperation and willingness to step down. He was expected to tie his address to the goals set out under the Mbeki administration, and he spent much of his speech addressing past achievements. He noted the construction of 2.6 million subsidized houses and the provision of potable water to 88 percent of the population and electricity to 72 percent. Ninety-five percent of South Africans now lived within 5 kilometers (3 miles) of a clinic or hospital, while more than 690,000 had signed up for treatment for AIDS, he said. The government also pays income grants to 12.4 million impoverished people. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that the gap between the rich and the poor was wide and that too many South Africans still lived in abject poverty.

[¶3.](#) (U) Looking forward, he highlighted challenges such as the effect of the global economic recession on South Africa, crime and corruption, quality of education, and the ongoing political crisis in Zimbabwe. On the economy, he set the stage for Finance Minister Trevor Manuel's budget speech on 11 February by saying that the global economic meltdown does pose serious dangers for the South African economy in terms of job losses and the quality of life of the South African people. Motlanthe said that "whatever economic storms may pound our shores, whatever political uncertainties may visit our collective consciousness in a transition - our nation is in a good state," which received a loud round of applause from the audience. The South African economy is strongly integrated into the world economy and, for this reason, demand for its exports have dropped. He warned that a lower demand has precipitated a scaling down of production, and the creation of jobs is negatively affected and in some sectors retrenchment has become a reality. He said "combined, these developments bode ill for the revenues we need to expand the provision of services and to implement our infrastructure projects. As such, we have been forced to tone down our forecasts

Qprojects. As such, we have been forced to tone down our forecasts in terms of growth and job-creation."

14. (U) He proceeded to highlight some of the steps the SAG will undertake to minimize the effects of the economic crises such as adapting industrial financing and incentive instruments to help deal with challenges in various sectors. He encouraged development finance institutions to assist firms in distress because of the crisis. He said public sector employment programs will be intensified. Plans to expand employment in sectors such as health, social work, education and law enforcement will continue and the government will speed up the introduction of the next phase of the expanded public works program.

15. (U) On crime and corruption, Motlanthe said the increase in violent robberies at homes and business premises was a matter of great concern. Apprehension about violent attacks is a daily experience in both poor and affluent neighborhoods and, although the crime rate has consistently declined since 1982 in the aggregate, progress in this regard has not been fast enough. Of particular concern was the fact that sexually based crimes against women and children has not abated. He singled out how the increase in some crime levels pointed to various weaknesses within the criminal justice system. "It points to systemic weaknesses in the criminal justice system, from investigation of crimes to rehabilitation of offenders [and] it points to weaknesses in the efficiency of the court system, both in terms of technical and other infrastructure and management." These were issues that the current comprehensive revamp of the criminal justice system had started to address. (Note: Crime and corruption are two controversial issues that troubled the President in recent months. On his short watch, the Directorate of Special Operations (aka, the "Scorpions") has been disbanded and the reasons surrounding the axing of national director of public prosecutions Vusi Pikoli remain suspiciously vague. Detractors suggest that the ANC disbanded the premier law enforcement agency

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because its actions led to the successful prosecution of too many ANC leaders. End Note)

16. (U) Motlanthe said he is concerned at the trend that schools in rural and impoverished areas lack infrastructure and capacity. "Ironically, precisely where education is most needed to help break the cycle of poverty is where infrastructure, administrative and teacher capacity are least impressive". He further raised concerns on the drop-out rate, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels, and challenged the educational system to produce the requisite kind of skills needed by society. The President did, however, note the achievements of the Department of Education, listing the drop in the teacher: pupil ratio, achieving almost universal access in terms of enrolment at primary school level and the improvement in the number of pupils passing mathematics as a few examples of its successful achievements.

17. (U) Motlanthe urged the international community to help rebuild Zimbabwe and end the humanitarian crisis once a unity government is installed next week. He said that Zimbabwe's feuding parties had achieved "the ultimate prize... that is, a stable and legitimate government. Now the work of reconstruction can start in earnest, and South Africa stands ready to assist wherever we can." He praised Mbeki for his role as facilitator in brokering a deal between the MDC and ZANU PF and stressed that there was an urgent need to deal with the growing humanitarian crises in that country. He said he was confident that the international community would assist the Zimbabwean people. He continued by congratulating the People's Republic of China for their ten year relationship with South Africa and also congratulated Cuba (to loud applause) on their 50 year anniversary of their attainment of sovereignty. He also extended congratulations to Tanzania, Ghana and the U.S. on their recent elections.

18. (U) Many expected the President to announce the date of the national election, however, he said he would announce the date "in the next few days" after concluding consultations with the Independent Electoral Commission. He urged all South African eligible voters to register and he expressed the hope that the election would be dignified and peaceful.

19. (U) Motlanthe said the 2010 Fifa World Cup to be hosted in South Africa should be used as a catalyst to shift perceptions about South Africa and the rest of the African continent. The President reiterated government's commitment to ensuring a successful

tournament in 2010, saying plans to host both the 2009 Fifa Confederations Cup and the 2010 Fifa World Cup were on track. Motlanthe also used the occasion of the State of the Nation Address to congratulate South African sportsmen and women who have excelled in the past year.

Comment

¶10. (U) Today's State of the Nation address was no doubt tricky for President Motlanthe, especially on the eve of an election in which his role is still unclear. As an unelected president, serving a caretaker role for a president in waiting, it is not clear whether Motlanthe will even have a place in the next government. The ANC expressed concern prior to the speech that Motlanthe not pre-empt what Zuma will say in his first presidential address to the nation after the elections. There were calls from Zuma supporters within the ANC and, in particular, from the Chief Whip Mnyameaeli Booi arguing that Motlanthe should not give the presidential address at all. They called for the event to be downgraded to a mere Qall. They called for the event to be downgraded to a mere parliamentary speech thereby underscoring Motlanthe's caretaker status. However, opposition parties made every effort to ensure that the event was not downgraded as some in the ANC would have preferred, but rather adhered to the pomp and splendor as befits the occasion.

¶11. (U) Motlanthe has recently come under attack from within his own party for not adhering to party policy. In ANC tradition, he is a deployed cadre subject to the direction of the National Executive committee which makes policy for the party. The ANC tends to conflate the party with the government and the recall of Thabo Mbeki was based on the ANC's belief that he was not acting on the behalf of the party's collective decision making process. Motlanthe's detractors are determined that he should not supplant Zuma in the nation's affections and have been blamed for media leaks about his private life which are seen as a bid to discredit him as a reasonable alternative to the legally challenged Zuma as the next president. e.

¶12. (U) Note. Former deputy presidents Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and Jacob Zuma as well as Congress of the People leader Mosiuoa Lekota accepted invitations to the opening of Parliament, however, ex-president Thabo Mbeki did not attend despite being invited. End note.